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RR RUEHDBU RUEHIK RUEHLN RUEHPOD RUEHSK RUEHSL RUEHVK RUEHYG

DE RUEHMO #1781/01 1911039

ZNR UUUUU ZZH

R 101039Z JUL 09

FM AMEMBASSY MOSCOW

TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 4208

INFO RUEHXD/MOSCOW POLITICAL COLLECTIVE

RUCNCIS/CIS COLLECTIVE

RUEHZG/NATO EU COLLECTIVE

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 03 MOSCOW 001781

SENSITIVE

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: PREL PGOV SNAR ECON RS

SUBJECT: U.S. HOUSE FOREIGN AFFAIRS COMMITTEE MEETS WITH DUMA COUNTERPARTS

¶1. (SBU) Summary: U.S. Representatives of the House Foreign Affairs Committee met with Duma deputies June 29 to discuss an array of issues affecting U.S.-Russia relations. Economic topics included Russia's WTO membership aspirations, IPR, corruption, and energy, while the discussion of internal issues covered Russian legislation on NGOs and political parties. In addition to discussing adoption and visa questions, Duma members drew attention to a 1998 vehicular accident in Vladivostok involving a former U.S. Consul General. On international issues, the sides discussed the NPT, START, missile defense, Iran, Pakistan, Afghanistan, and North Korea. End Summary.

Duma & House Foreign Affairs Committees Meet

¶2. (SBU) In welcoming remarks for Chairman of the House Foreign Affairs Committee Howard Berman (D-CA), Representatives Howard Coble (R-NC), Bill Delahunt (D-MA), Brad Miller (D-NC), Dana Rohrabacher (R-CA), David Scott (D-GA), and Albio Sires (D-NJ), Duma Speaker Boris Gryzlov (United Russia) and Chairman of the Duma Committee on International Affairs Konstantin Kosachev (United Russia) noted the value of the Duma-HFAC meetings, now in their fourth round, as one of the few venues for the U.S. and Russian lower houses to communicate. Kosachev welcomed Chairman Berman's suggestion to host the next round of meetings outside of the capital area, while maintaining the current format of the talks.

U.S.-Russian Relations

¶3. (SBU) In the first session of the June 29 talks, Kosachev characterized U.S.-Russian relations as in a third phase since the collapse of the Soviet Union. After initial "romantic relations" under President Yeltsin in the 90's, the post-9/11 era was one of goodwill, but no follow-up, Kosachev posited, leading to a growing disappointment in Russia with the U.S. Now, in the third phase of relations in the wake of the August 2008 Russia-Georgia war, the U.S. and Russia needed to find a way to coexist and cooperate, moving away from an "our-theirs" world view to one of solving global problems such as the economic crisis or Afghanistan. In this regard, Kosachev argued against moralizing politics in favor of moving toward a pragmatic approach in U.S.-Russian relations, as the U.S. was already doing with China. Committee member Valeriy Bogomolov (United Russia) asserted that all countries leveraged their advantages, saying, "We act like you do. In foreign policy there are no friends, only interests."

¶5. (SBU) First Deputy Chairman of the Committee on International Affairs Leonid Slutsky (Liberal Democratic Party) listed permanent normal trade relations, graduation from Jackson-Vanik, the 123 Agreement, and disarmament as major issues in U.S.-Russia relations.

While Committee member Semyon Bagdasarov (Fair Russia) noted differences in opinion on issues such as Manas, the Baltics, Iran, Syria, Georgia, and Afghanistan, Committee member Mikhail Terentiev

urged both sides to find uniting, not dividing subjects, with support from First Deputy Chairman of the Duma Committee on Economic Policy and Enterprises Vladimir Golovnyov (United Russia), who asked the U.S. to aid Russia in creating a high-tech economy. In response, Chairman Berman stated that the U.S. would revise its technology export controls regarding Russia but that the U.S. was concerned with the re-export of sensitive technology (e.g., Russian-Iranian cooperation).

¶4. (SBU) In his opening remarks, Representative Delahunt suggested people-to-people exchanges as one way to rebuild U.S.-Russian relations. Noting the presence of Olympic gold medalists in the Duma, he proposed creating a sports-based exchange program for young people. Terentiev and others welcomed Rep. Delahunt's proposal.

Economics

WTO

¶6. (SBU) Russian parliamentarians were optimistic about the chances for the trilateral customs union between Belarus, Russia and Kazakhstan to join the WTO, claiming that the unprecedented membership process did not contravene WTO rules. Noting the "discriminating terms" upon which Russia's neighbors (e.g., Ukraine, Georgia, and Moldova) were admitted to the WTO, Kosachev stated that there was a lack of consensus among Russia's political-business establishment regarding the advantages of joining the WTO.

IPR

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¶7. (SBU) Russian Duma members stated that intellectual property protection had improved in Russia in recent years, with Slutskiy suggesting that the problem of piracy was now no worse in Russia than in the U.S.

Corruption

¶8. (SBU) In response to Rep Delahunt's statement that corruption hindered foreign investment in Russia, Kosachev asserted that the issue of corruption was an internal Russian problem, which the GOR was committed to tackling.

Energy

¶9. (SBU) Bagdasarov suggested that there were two categories of energy states among former Soviet republics: 1) rich energy states such as those in Central Asia, and 2) transit countries such as Ukraine and Georgia. Along with Slutskiy, he claimed that Ukraine exploited its role as an energy transit state for political ends, whereas Russia never used its energy supply to pressure neighboring states. Noting that Russian gas still flowed to Georgia during the August 2008 conflict, Kosachev stated that Russia would trade gas with Ukraine regardless of its political regime. Kosachev said that Russia had been charging neighboring states lower than average prices for gas to elicit support from their regimes, and claimed that energy discords with these states were a product of Russia's raising gas prices to market levels.

Adoptions

¶10. (SBU) Chairman of the Committee on Family, Women and Children Elena Mizulina (Fair Russia) argued that while there had been relatively few deaths of adopted Russian children in the U.S. (16), these cases had reverberated throughout Russia. Therefore some Duma deputies were considering prohibiting the adoption of Russian children by U.S. citizens. To ward that off, Mizulina proposed an

information-sharing agreement on adopted children, which would help dispel the "myths" that existed within Russia on Russian children adopted by Americans. Congressman Delahunt rejected Mizulina's criticism that the Hague Convention on Intercountry Adoption was mainly designed to protect the interests of adopting parents, and urged Russia to ratify the Convention.

Visas

¶11. (SBU) Calling the U.S. and Russian visa regimes a "stumbling block" in U.S.-Russian relations, Member of the Committee on Family, Women, and Children and Olympic Gold Medal winner Svetlana Zhurova lamented the continual problems for Russian citizens in obtaining U.S. tourist visas, including denials for prominent, well-to-do Russian businessmen, sportsmen and politicians.

Alexander Kashin

¶12. (SBU) During the business lunch, Parliamentarian Maksim Mishenko (United Russia) drew attention to a 1998 case in which former U.S. Consul General in Vladivostok Douglas Kent was involved in a car accident with Russian citizen Alexander Kashin, which left Kashin partially paralyzed. Mishenko stated that providing adequate compensation to Kashin would help strengthen bilateral ties, as many Russians considered the case a test of U.S.-Russian relations. In what appeared to be a pre-planned move, Chairman Kosachev presented a document to Chairman Berman outlining the Russian position on the accident and requesting adequate compensation to Mr. Kashin. Following the lunch, Chairman Berman was met outside the Duma dining room by the press, who photographed and filmed him with the document. Subsequently, during the closing press conference between the two foreign affairs committees, Parliamentarian Mishenko brought in the wheelchair-bound Kashin to be photographed and filmed with the Congressmen.

NGOs & Press Freedom

¶13. (SBU) Speaking to concerns shared by Congressmen on the status of NGOs within Russia, Chairman Kosachev announced that in Fall, the Duma would introduce changes to Russian legislation that regulated

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NGOs with the aim of reducing its "restrictive nature." Turning to the spike in killings of Russian journalists in recent years, Chairman Kosachev admitted that the assassinations had been a blow to Russia's reputation and stated that all killings would be thoroughly investigated. On press freedom, Chairman Kosachev said that Russia's "pluralistic press" included many which were critical of the GOR. Noting that equal access to TV among political parties remained a problem, Kosachev stated that the Duma was working on a bill to assure equal press access to all Russian political parties.

WMD

¶14. (SBU) Chairman of the State Duma Defense Committee and former Russian Ambassador to NATO, General Victor Zavarzin (United Russia), said that Russia favored strengthening and universalizing the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) and improving international inspection and verification regimes such as the IAEA. Although he claimed that Iran was far from developing a reliable nuclear weapon, he advocated tying Iran into the NPT framework. Russia agreed with the U.S. that recent North Korean missile tests violated UN resolutions, and that it was necessary to continue Six-Party talks with North Korea. While it was important to conclude a follow-up START Treaty that addressed all forms of nuclear weapon delivery systems, Zavarzin charged that the proposed U.S. missile defense (MD) system hindered U.S.-Russia cooperation on complex issues. Chairman Berman responded that the threat of a nuclear Iran was the

reason for the MD system, adding that the Obama administration was reviewing the U.S. policy on MD.

¶15. (SBU) Bagdasarov cited North Korea and Pakistan as countries of great concern to Russia. Arguing that it was "normal" to desire to obtain nukes, he said the real question was not whether Iran would develop nuclear weapons, but whether the governing regime was a friend or foe of the U.S. Congressman Delahunt stated that a nuclear-armed Iran could turn on Russia, causing Kosachev to call for greater U.S.-Russian intelligence cooperation, claiming that Russia was not privy to the intelligence that proved an Iranian missile threat.

¶16. (SBU) Chairman Berman rejected Committee on International Affairs member and Communist Party member Yuliy Kvisinkiy's claim that the U.S. was behind recent post-election unrest in Iran and sought regime change there as it had in Kosovo, Georgia, and Ukraine. Kvisinkiy argued that Iran would hardly attack the U.S., knowing it could be annihilated by a U.S. nuclear response. Alleging a nuclear Iran would not change the regional balance of power, Kvisinkiy said the U.S. was using the Iranian missile threat so as to justify its MD plans. Representative Rohrabacher responded that Russia had nothing to fear from the U.S. MD system.

Afghanistan

¶17. (SBU) Bogomolov said that the narcotics problem in Afghanistan was destabilizing Central Asia and an important source of terrorist funding. In response, Congressman Rohrabacher stated that the U.S. possessed a fungus that could destroy Afghanistan's poppies within one week, which it had not used yet out of concern that the fungus could be considered a biological weapon by some.

BEYRLE